

# Plants

## AT LEAST LET US TRY

William Sawyer of 42 Harrison St. received the following letter from Henry Davis, president of Lowden Inc., an insect and disease control development firm.)

I recently reviewed your elm trees and they certainly look magnificent - no signs of Dutch elm disease. It is truly heartbreaking to see the elms that are dying in Duxbury due to apathy, neglect, disinterest and simply poor maintenance procedures.

Of principal concern is the tree directly across the street from you. This tree is now practically rubbing branches with the fine specimen that we cured of Dutch elm disease about four years ago. I would recommend that injection procedures be carried out on this tree, even though it does not have disease, so as to hopefully eliminate any chance of disease in the root system of this tree due to root graft with the adjacent diseased tree.

I also strongly recommend that you do everything possible to at least have the diseased tree girdled to a depth of about 4 inches, as quickly as possible, to slow down the movement of disease into the roots of this tree where they may be grafted to yours across the street.

Enclosed is a postcard for your convenience in authorizing these injection procedures, which will amount to about \$200. for 1973. Such a procedure should not be necessary if a town would show some concern, or at least cooperate with owners of elms who have done such a fine job in maintaining them. It is truly unfortunate that others are not as foresighted as you are.

## CAN SOMETHING BE DONE?

Some 15 years ago when we were guests on a cruise a Duxboroughaut motioned towards the Washington St. shoreline as we sailed down the channel.

"Look at that tree," he said. "It's the tallest tree on Washington St."

We learned later that it was an elm on our property at 281 Washington St. It was one of 2 elms on the edge of our property fronting on Washington St.. We lost both, along with 5 other elms, 2 of them towering umbrella elms.

Despite the ministrations of Roy Parks, nothing at that time could be done to save those elms -- among scores of the victims of the Dutch elm disease.

Since Roy's retirement (and what a magnificent job he did as tree warden), his successor, Alvin Borgeson has done his best to lessen the fatality, but apparently he has lacked both the manpower and funds to cope with the situation, as implied in the letter to

Duxbury Clipper, Thursday, July 12, 1973

William Sawyer from a tree expert (see above).

From this letter, and especially from the news story in the adjoining columns, it is obvious that something CAN BE DONE to save elms, which may have a life expectancy up to 300 years.

It must be 20 years since we read in Science News Letter that an elm (at THAT time) was valued up to \$1200.

What is an elm worth now, and just what are we doing to protect our elms?

Twenty years ago the beautiful old homes and streets of Duxbury were lined in many sections with stately elms, as William Sawyer wrote in a letter to Dr. Lansing Bennett, chairman of the Duxbury Conservation Commission. "These magnificent elms gave not only tremendous beauty, but much needed shade. The town has taken many progressive steps to preserve its beauty and its heritage, starting with the acre zoning, the acquisition of large tracts of land for town forest, the preservation of the cranberry bogs and now the truly protective bylaws for planned unit development of future housing in the town. It is with a great deal of sadness that in driving around the town over recent years I have witnessed countless numbers of elm trees being cut down. Many of the trees are hundreds of years old, and it will take several generations to replace them.

"Fully appreciating your dedication to the preservation of old Duxbury and the great service you have performed for the town over the years, I write to see if something cannot be done to take steps to save the few remaining elms in the town. In the meantime, please rest assured that I will authorize the additional expenditure of funds to try to protect the gorgeous tree in front of our house and the diseased elm across the street. I don't know how many hundreds of dollars I have spent to save the tree, but whatever it is, it is worth it and must be done not only to preserve the beauty of my own property, but of Harrison St."

As mentioned in his letter to Bennett, Sawyer notes that 5 years ago the town had to come and cut down 2 beautiful elms on his property facing Harrison St. "Inasmuch as I have 3 beautiful trees remaining, I made up my mind to find out if there was any way possible to save these trees. I contacted Henry Davis, president of Lowden Tree Specialists, Inc., Needham Heights. After a considerable amount of time and work pruning, spraying and fertilizing the 3 trees at an expense of many hundreds of dollars, the trees were completely cured.

"The one remaining tree on Harrison St. I believe to be one of the most beautiful trees in Duxbury. Davis thinks the tree is so magnificent he wanted to put a plaque on the tree. I have considered that, if at any time I should ever sell my house, I would endeavor to deed the tree to the town with, hopefully, some kind of perpetual care donation so it could continue to beautify the town and be enjoyed by generations to come."

Something HAS been done, and something CAN be done.

We ask the selectmen to look into the situation and perhaps put an article in the warrant of the next special town meeting to appoint a committee (that should include Dr. Lansing Bennett and other active conservationists) to see if we can save our remaining elms before it is too late to even think of saving them.

ed by it. The injection attacks the fungus in the tree.

A man with 27 years in the arborist business, Heintzelman says the fungus kills the tree by plugging up the cells carrying the sap.

"It's like hardening of the arteries in a human being."

The problem now is to persuade communities and private tree owners to undertake the effort and expense (\$75 per tree per year) needed to make the treatment work. By contrast removal of a dead tree costs about \$300, he says.

#### GOOD SUCCESS RATE

Heintzelman says the treatment is "60 to 90% successful." Since June when they treated about 200 elm trees in the tri-city area, only 4 of these trees fell victim to the disease.

"It's the first effective method for control of Dutch elm disease that I know of," said the veteran arborist.

The treatment and care of elm trees or any tree for that matter requires skill and technical knowledge. For this reason the label registering Benlate use for Dutch elm disease control restricts its application to trained arborists.

Heintzelman has attended several training sessions on the use of Benlate. Much of this background was gathered by him at a Dutch Elm Disease Systemic Fungicide (Benlate) Seminar held in April by the University of Wisconsin College of Agriculture of Milwaukee and Madison, Wisconsin. Research in this field has been conducted by the university for more than 4 years.

Heintzelman is a member of the Elm Research Institute and chairman of the Pennsylvania Nurserymen's Association, eastern division. He also is a member of several other arborist-related organizations.

#### LIVE LONG LIFE

With proper care arborists say elm trees have a life expectancy of 300 years. If at-

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## WAY IS FOUND

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tacked by the Dutch elm disease their longevity can be reduced to one or 2 years. The disease is caused by a fungus that was introduced into this country about 40 years ago by logs imported from Holland.

The fungus blocks circulation of the sap until the tree dies from lack of water.

While the disease attacks the tree's circulatory system, the treatment takes advantage of the method used to spread the sap.

To begin with, careful selection should be made of elms for preventive treatment to provide greatest opportunity for its success, Heintzelman says.

Elms in areas where losses are occurring at the 2 to 8% range, but where root graft problems do not exist or are under rigid control and where good sanitation (removing dead wood) exists, are perhaps best

suited for preventive treatment, he noted. The arborist will examine the trees and determine the proper method for treatment.

### CAPSULES HOLD CHEMICAL

If Benlate is to be used, the arborist places the material in plastic capsules (Mauget type) with two ounces of the chemical. Then metal sleeves, or tubes, that fit the plastic capsules, are inserted into the tree at the proper depth, height and interval around the tree.

The next step involves filling the sleeve with the chemical by means of a syringe needle instrument to prevent an air lock before attacking the capsules. After the chemical is absorbed (usually 24-48 hours) the capsules and tubes are removed for re-use.

It's the beginning of the battle to save the elm tree.

Heintzelman sums it up this way: "It's a step in the right direction. We're getting results and anything can be improved."